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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger
SUBJECT: Soviet Military Buildup Along the Chinese Border

The Department of Defense and CIA have each assessed the implications of the Soviet military buildup along the Chinese border. These memoranda indicate that there are presently between 36 and 41 Soviet ground force divisions deployed in the border area (roughly 210,000 combat troops and another 125,000 support troops). That compares to some 12 divisions in the same area in 1965 before the buildup began. Only 6-9 of the currently deployed divisions are judged to be at combat strength but the others all have one or more regiments with sufficient strength to perform combat missions.

In addition, there are now some 730 tactical fighter and light bomber aircraft along the Soviet side of the border. There has also been a more than one hundred percent increase in Soviet helicopters in the border region since 1968 with more than 300 now deployed in that area. The Soviets also have deployed a number of 500-mile SCALEBOARD mobile surface-to-surface missile launchers along the Chinese border. In addition, there are some 40-45 medium/intermediate range ballistic missiles within range of Chinese targets which could be used in an attack.

Both CIA and Defense agree that the Soviet force now deployed in the border area is more than adequate for defense against Chinese incursions. Defense notes that it might not be adequate, however, to defend against a full-scale, concentrated Chinese attack, even if the Soviets used nuclear weapons. CIA is inclined toward the view that superior Soviet firepower, mobility and their ability to control the air as well as Soviet tactical nuclear superiority would enable the USSR to repel any force the Chinese are likely to send against it in the next few years.

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The Defense Department and CIA are in agreement that the Soviet buildup has not reached a point which indicates an intention to launch a major offensive against China.

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With their present strength along the border, however, the Soviets could stage division sized raids on Chinese territory and they could, of course, at any time strike Chinese targets with air and missile weapons, either conventional or nuclear. There is a consensus that the Soviets probably intended their buildup to impress the Chinese with Soviet determination to rebuff forcefully any Chinese incursion across the border. Moscow may also have hoped the buildup would help set the stage for the border talks by convincing Peking that there was a real danger of war unless they agreed to talks.

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Finally, both CIA and the Defense Department express the belief that the Soviet military buildup along the Chinese border will continue. CIA suggests a possible eventual Soviet goal is to have a force of between 42 and 48 divisions along the Chinese border while DOD states that at present it cannot judge what the upper limit for the buildup may be.

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